

Tom Horne
Superintendent

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ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

For more information, contact Amy Rezzonico, Press Secretary (602) 542-5072

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ARIZONA SCHOOLS CHIEF TOM HORNE RESPONDS TO LETTER FROM 16 STATE REPRESENTATIVES ALLEGING RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY MATTERS

PHOENIX (Monday, May 7, 2007) – In a letter to all Arizona legislators (attached), Arizona Schools Chief Tom Horne responds to a letter signed by 16 Arizona State Legislators alleging racial discrimination in school disciplinary matters. The 16 legislators asked for a task force to develop a procedure for students or their parents to appeal from school district decisions.

Horne is opposed to adding a further level of appeal, because school boards need to be more supportive of teachers in establishing the level of discipline necessary to achieve academic excellence, and adding another level of appeal could have a detrimental effect.

Horne responded to the entire Legislature that “if a student received different discipline for the same act because of the student’s race, that is terrible, inexcusable, and it is hard to think of anything worse.”

However, with 24 years of school board experience, Horne has substantial experience with student discipline, and knows that students who are caught in the act will make up any story to get out of the consequences. Government officials must have a certain degree of skepticism, and not accept allegations without evidence. Horne requested that legislators forward any reports of alleged discrimination and the Department of Education would investigate.

Horne added: “Our society has experienced a significant reduction in the extent to which parents support schools in the maintenance of classroom discipline. Parents used to support schools in making students understand that actions have consequences. Now, some parents become advocates for their children. Principals report that the students who get into major trouble are the ones whose parents oppose the school in the first instance of discipline. When parents support the school, and help teach the students that actions have consequences, students tend to not get into major trouble in the long term.”

Horne added that the Arizona Department of Education has had an initiative to encourage school boards to be more supportive of teachers in maintaining the kind of discipline to an atmosphere necessary for academic achievement: “I believe that we cannot achieve the

academic excellence for which we are striving without maintaining strict discipline in the classroom. This requires that school boards do a better job of supporting teachers and administrators in maintaining that discipline.

Adding still another layer of appeal by the student or the student's parents could have a contrary effect to the desired goal: getting school boards to be more supportive of teachers and administrators in imposing the classroom discipline that is necessary for academic success."

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